

1.4 SUMMARY OF PROJECT PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of this project is to identify the preferred corridor for eventual construction of a multilane facility that meets future transportation and safety needs for US 8. The corridor begins at WIS 35 (N) in Polk County and extends 40 miles (64 km) to US 53 in Barron County. Preservation of the corridor would follow the identification of the preferred corridor until the proposed long-range improvements are warranted. The ultimate goal is a transportation system improvement that preserves highway mobility and complements and supports planned land uses while also addressing local transportation needs and avoiding or minimizing adverse environmental impacts.

A tiered approach will be used for environmental documentation and ultimate construction. This EIS is a Tier 1 document to gain consensus on the basic location and design vision for the overall corridor without detailed engineering. The Tier 2 effort would include formal corridor preservation efforts (Wis. Stat. 84.295) to officially map the ultimate corridor. The Tier 3 effort would advance portions of the proposed corridor to detailed project design levels and construction as conditions and needs require, and as funding is made available. Tiers 2 and 3 would include additional environmental documentation efforts. Tier 3 efforts for the entire 40 miles (64 km) will likely take decades to fund and complete. The project is needed because:

- **The importance of the US 8 corridor from national, state, regional and local perspectives.** This segment of US 8 from WIS 35 (N) to US 53 is classified as a Connector Route in Wisconsin's Corridors 2020 Plan and is a principal east-west arterial in northern Wisconsin. Corridors 2020 identifies the state's most important transportation routes. As a connector, US 8 links Polk and Barron counties to central and southern Wisconsin and the region to the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area. Local traffic uses US 8 as a primary route to area workplaces and businesses. US 8 serves as a main route to many area tourist and recreational attractions.
- **Long-term corridor planning and preservation.** Communities on the US 8 corridor are experiencing growth and development pressures. To maintain mobility through and around the communities along the corridor, long-term land use planning needs to consider the future of the US 8 corridor. This is a need that must be addressed to allow local units of government opportunity to initiate strategies for preservation of future bypass corridors.
- **Future traffic volumes indicate need for expansion.** Current traffic volumes on US 8 in the rural areas range from 6,370 to 10,950 ADT and projected traffic volumes in the year 2030 range from 9,900 to 14,800 ADT. When traffic volumes exceed 12,000 ADT, even if passing lanes are in place, it is expected LOS will deteriorate to substandard levels. The ability for traffic on side roads to access or cross US 8 will also become increasingly difficult.
- **Improvements to correct substandard roadway items.** Substandard roadway items along US 8 include inadequate stopping sight distance on vertical curves at over 24 locations, horizontal curves with superelevation that exceeds the maximum of six percent, and substandard shoulder width in one segment. A high number of access points exceed WisDOT's Facilities Development Manual (FDM) guidelines, particularly in the Barron, Poskin, Range, and Deer Lake areas.
- **Higher than average crash rates for portions of the corridor.** The urban areas of Barron and Turtle Lake have higher than average crash rates for the five year period analyzed. The high number of access points, combined with insufficient gaps, contribute to high crash rates within the city of Barron. The fatal crash rate was above the statewide average in four of the five rural segments and in one of the four urban segments.
- **Legislative Mandate and Public Input.** The State Legislature mandated the US 8 corridor study by enumerating funds based on input from the US 8 Coalition. Feedback from the US 8 Coalition, local officials and the general public indicate strong advocacy for improvements to the US 8 corridor.